The Adelaide Zero Project: Ending street homelessness in the inner city

Dr Selina Tually and Dr Debbie Faulkner

Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning, The University of Adelaide

Associate Professor Ian Goodwin-Smith and Dr Victoria Skinner

Australian Centre for Community Services Research

Flinders University, Adelaide

Mr David Pearson

Don Dunstan Foundation, Adelaide

The Adelaide Zero Project is an ambitious initiative aimed at ending street homelessness (rough sleeping) in the Adelaide CBD and surrounding parklands area.

Background

Street homelessness has proven an intractable problem in inner Adelaide (Figure 1), with the increasing visibility of street homelessness over recent months fuelling media and public interest, debate and concern in the challenge locally. The Adelaide inner city area remains the point of highest concentration of people sleeping rough in Adelaide and South Australia. Our best available data currently suggests up to 120 people sleeping rough in the inner city area on any given night; a small number in comparison to other places, but absolutely unacceptable in a city as liveable as Adelaide.

Figure 1: Number of people sleeping rough, Adelaide Inner City Rough Sleeper Count, June 2007 to September 2017 ()
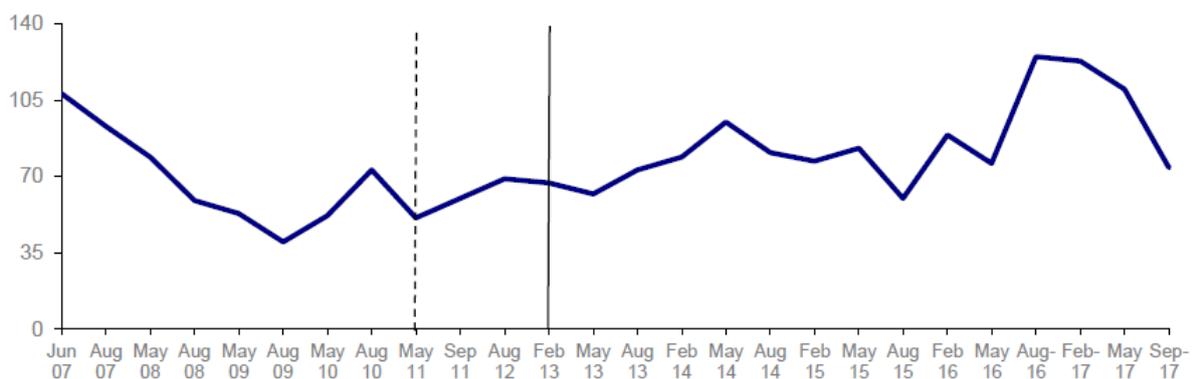
NOTE: The solid vertical line indicates the inclusion of additional collection points and the dashed vertical line is to indicate the change in the questionnaire to focus purely on people sleeping rough

Source: Department for Communities and Social Inclusion 2017, p. 6.

Note: The September 2017 Street Count was impacted by a methodological issue that impacted the final number. This will be rectified for the next Street Count (DCSI 2017; Adelaide Zero Project 2018).

The Adelaide Zero Project aims to achieve an end to homelessness by utilising the Functional Zero approach, a model developed by Community Solutions in the US (discussed further below). The Functional Zero approach is seeing successes across the US, with ten communities having ended veteran and/or chronic homelessness as participants in a coordinated campaign involving 75 communities known as Built for Zero. The approach is also being applied in other places globally, including across Canada, some areas of Europe and in a small number of places in Australia, including Brisbane and Perth.
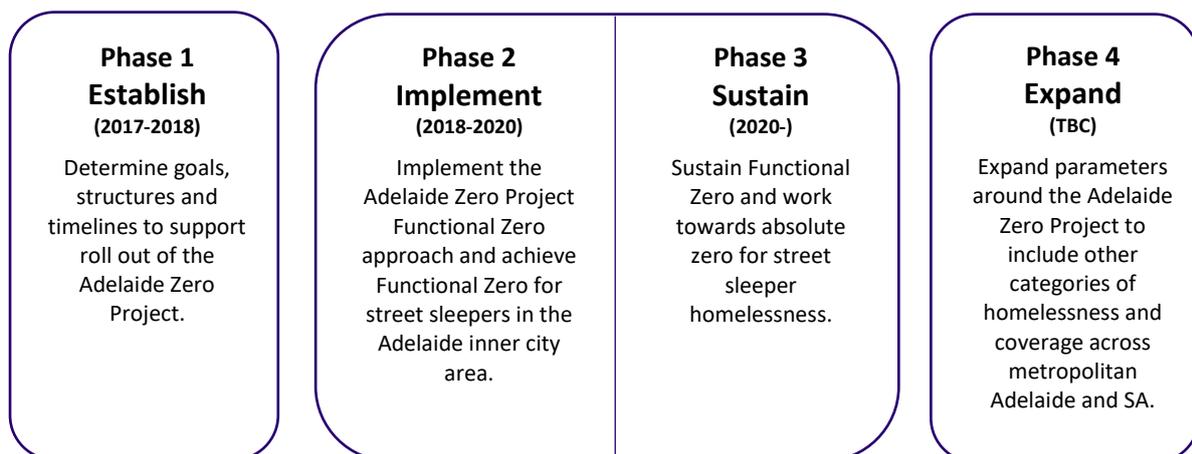
The Adelaide Zero Project

Goal

The Adelaide Zero Project has adopted the interim goal of *achieving and sustaining Functional Zero street homelessness in Adelaide's inner city by the end of 2020, ensuring that all rough sleepers in the inner city who want a place to call home have one*. The Project is specifically focussed on ending homelessness for people sleeping rough first in line with concerns about the vulnerability of this 'group', the acuteness of their needs and their risk of dying on the streets. The Adelaide Zero Project's goal will be reviewed following analysis of the by-name data collected about people sleeping rough through Connections Week, conducted in mid-May 2018.

Phases

The Adelaide Zero Project comprises four largely sequential phases of activity as shown in Figure 2. Phase 1 of the Project has centred on, and been directed by, the Zero Research Project (Tually et al. 2017 and forthcoming). The Zero Research Project has localised the Functional Zero approach for the Adelaide context, with the research team working collaboratively with all project partners to develop a conceptually strong model to end homelessness in Adelaide.

Figure 2: Phases of the Adelaide Zero Project

Phase 1 Establish (2017-2018)	Phase 2 Implement (2018-2020)	Phase 3 Sustain (2020-)	Phase 4 Expand (TBC)
Determine goals, structures and timelines to support roll out of the Adelaide Zero Project.	Implement the Adelaide Zero Project Functional Zero approach and achieve Functional Zero for street sleepers in the Adelaide inner city area.	Sustain Functional Zero and work towards absolute zero for street sleeper homelessness.	Expand parameters around the Adelaide Zero Project to include other categories of homelessness and coverage across metropolitan Adelaide and SA.

Functional Zero

Functional Zero is a disruptive approach. It is a Housing First (not housing only) approach. In simplest terms, 'a community reaches Functional Zero when the average capacity of its housing system is greater than the existing need and this can be proven with data' (Adelaide Zero Project 2018, p. 6). The approach is based on a count *down* methodology; with this methodological shift a departure from

the traditional way of measuring success in homelessness interventions which emphasises reporting (counting up) the total numbers of people assisted (i.e. counting up to housing outcomes).

The Functional Zero approach places the onus on services to know the names and needs of every homeless person in focus for a community (rough sleepers in Adelaide) at any point in time– with such data collected initially through a comprehensive volunteer-driven survey of people sleeping rough known as a Registry Week (Connections Week for the Adelaide Zero Project). Services must then work rapidly to coordinate resources and responses to meet individuals' needs (Sandor 2015). The Functional Zero approach uses the real-time by-name data collected about individuals and their needs to track progress and to understand which strategies work best to align housing and support to individuals' needs, thereby driving down rough sleeper numbers.

Unlike many other approaches for assisting homeless people, resources and responses are prioritised based on need (vulnerability). Such prioritisation requires application of a triage tool; the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) in Adelaide (and other cases).

The Functional Zero approach requires robust data on six data points as shown in Figure 3. The model is not without critics (Erlenbusch 2015), but as noted earlier in this paper there are now ten proof points in the US, with a growing number of other communities seeing month on month reductions in the homeless population in focus, providing further evidence of the model's utility.

Figure 3: Functional Zero inflow and outflow data
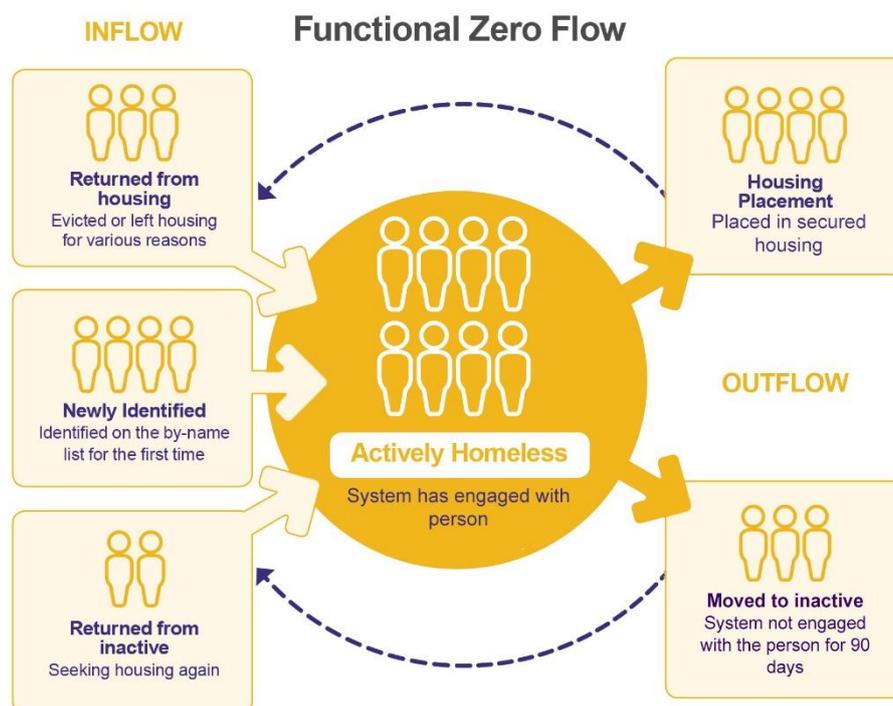
Source: adapted (with permission) from Community Solutions 2017.

Ultimately,

> Functional Zero will be reached in Adelaide when the number of people sleeping on the streets at any point in time, is no greater than the average housing placement rate for that same period (usually a month). (Adelaide Zero Project, p. 6).

Importantly, achieving Functional Zero in inner Adelaide does not mean anyone will ever be street homeless again. What it will mean for Adelaide is that we have a system designed to efficiently and effectively meet the needs of someone who finds themselves homeless and that we know in as close to real time as possible the needs of everyone who is homeless and have prioritised (triaged) people according to such needs to ensure the best use of limited resources.

Process

The Adelaide Zero Project is a Collective Impact initiative. It is supported by the energy of more than 30 partner agencies from the non-government, government, philanthropic and business sectors. Project partners are committed to the common goal of the Project and to mutually reinforcing activities to achieve the goal, and to sharing data to understand and meet the needs of people sleeping rough. The Project is backboned by the Don Dunstan Foundation, a thought leadership organisation. The Foundation was established to inspire action for a fairer world, building on the legacy of late Premier Don Dunstan. It focuses on social justice issues, including homelessness, mental health, and empowerment of Aboriginal people.

The Adelaide Zero Project had its genesis in a challenge issued to Adelaide, its homelessness sector and the broader community by former Adelaide Thinker in Residence[1] Rosanne Haggerty (President and Chief Executive Officer of Community Solutions, US) during her keynote address at the Don Dunstan Foundation's *2016 Addressing Homelessness Conference* (August 2016). Haggerty challenged Adelaide to renew 'community' by harnessing community strengths and resources to end homelessness among the most vulnerable on the streets. Haggerty's challenge reminded us about shifting ideology and practice around homelessness, specifically the emergence of actions to 'end' rather than just 'address' (manage) homelessness (see Parsell, Jones and Head 2012 for the Australian context).

The Adelaide Zero Project has benefitted greatly from its Collective Impact underpinnings: a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; and backbone support organisation (Kania & Kramer, 2011), who in the case of this Project, and perhaps uniquely, is independent of, and uninvolved in, service delivery. The Project has a solid governance structure that extends existing collaborative arrangements between key players in homeless and interfacing sectors and which emphasises broad buy-in and engagement, cross-sectoral leadership, Project advancement and co-design and accountability in actions to end homelessness. The governance structure includes a Strategic Advisory Group which provides high level oversight and which is an important conduit between the project and policy and decision making at a local and state level. The Project has also benefitted from other key processes used to support its conception and evolution: the Zero Research Project involving researchers from The University of Adelaide and Flinders University and the SA Government's 90 Day (Change) Project structure which supports 'organisations to deliver projects that address complex problems, with a focus on delivering genuine public value' (Office for the Public Sector 2018). The Adelaide Zero 90-Day Project unlocked important

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[1] A former initiative of State Government that brought leaders in their fields to SA to work with the community and government in the development of new ideas and approaches for addressing complex problems and advancing and promoting SA. The Don Dunstan Foundation revived the Program after it was defunded.

resources within government, assisting with the evolution of the actions needed in Adelaide to implement a Functional Zero approach. The Adelaide Zero 90-Day Project team, in conjunction with the Zero Research Project team and Don Dunstan Foundation and guided by the Adelaide Zero Project Steering Group, developed the Adelaide Zero Project Implementation Plan (Adelaide Zero Project 2018) and in a fast-tracked timeframe. Additionally, the Project has built and profits from relationships with a number of key local, national and international partners (Figure 4) who are important supporting structures, including the resources and expertise of Community Solutions, the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness and the community of practice within the Institute for Global Homelessness *A Place to Call Home* (Vanguard City) initiative, which the IGH has awarded to the Adelaide Zero Project.

Figure 4: Supporting networks for the Adelaide Zero Project

Source: Tually et al. 2017, p. 30.

Architecture

The Adelaide Zero Project is based on a foundational architecture comprising 8 building blocks: the Adelaide Zero Project's core components. The core components (Figure 5) – the key elements in a Zero project – have been established after review of the Functional Zero model and how it has been applied in other communities, especially those who have achieved and are sustaining Functional Zero homelessness in their target population. The establishment of the components has also been predicated on Collective Impact thinking.

Figure 5: Foundational Architecture: The Adelaide Zero Project Core Components

Coalition of stakeholders
Working collaboratively to make the greatest difference for people sleeping rough.

By-name data
Using street outreach to know the names and needs of every person sleeping rough in the inner city.

Commitment to Housing First
Ensuring people sleeping rough are housed in secure, safe, appropriate and affordable housing with the right supports in place to sustain it.

Shared goals
Consistently collecting person-specific data to accurately track progress toward achieving the Adelaide Zero Project goal.
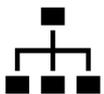
Continuous improvement
Continually learning what works by testing new ideas to quickly build on successful strategies and actions.

Engagement
Involving the community in the solutions for ending homelessness and providing opportunities for people to play a meaningful part in helping to find such solutions.

Governance
Involving the right people to drive progress, ensure accountability and address challenges and system barriers to support the Adelaide Zero Project achieve its goal.

Systems integration
Building coordinated housing and support systems that are simple to navigate, while efficiently targeting resources to those who need them most.

Alongside the core components, a series of actions or structures to advance efforts and responses to end street homelessness in inner Adelaide have been developed. Such actions or structures are referred to as the Adelaide Zero Project mechanisms. The mechanisms (Figure 6) – the operational elements of the Project – have been adopted for the Adelaide Zero Project because they are part of the Functional Zero approach or because of appropriateness in the local context. Reflecting the collective action focus of the Adelaide Zero Project, each mechanism has been assigned to a lead agency who has responsibility for advancing efforts in that piece of the broader puzzle that is the Adelaide Zero Project.

Figure 6: Adelaide Zero Project operational elements (mechanisms).

Mechanism	Lead agency	Mechanism	Lead agency
M1: Aligned Housing	AnglicareSA	M8: Continuous Improvement and Evaluation	Australian Centre for Community Services Research (ACCSR)
M2: Business Alliance to End Homelessness	City of Adelaide	M9: Governance	Don Dunstan Foundation
M3: By-Name List	Neami National (SA)	M10: National and International partnerships	Don Dunstan Foundation
M4: Charter	End Homelessness SA	M11: Research and Data Analytics	Centre for Housing, Urban and Regional Planning
M5: Common Assessment Tool	Neami National (SA)	M12: Solutions Labs	Don Dunstan Foundation
M6: Connections Week	Hutt St Centre	M13: Targets and AZP Dashboard	Don Dunstan Foundation
M7: Coordinated Care	Uniting Communities	M14: Zero Communications Strategy	Don Dunstan Foundation

The core components provide the foundation for the Adelaide Zero Project that all actions (mechanisms) will work to meet or reinforce. The components and mechanisms are at the basis of the Adelaide Zero Project Implementation Plan released at the end of February 2018, the Project's forward action strategy which centres on seven steps to achieve and sustain an end to street homelessness in Adelaide. The Implementation Plan is a living document. It will be reviewed periodically to ensure currency and reflect Project learnings and needs. The first update to the Plan is currently in process, reflecting lessons to date.

Progress and next steps

At press the Adelaide Zero Project has reached an important and exciting milestone: progressing from the establishment phase (Phase 1) towards full implementation (Phase 2). Reaching this milestone has followed the completion of extensive conceptualisation and planning work. Significant time and effort has been directed at planning the Adelaide Zero Project, engaging the 'right' stakeholders, setting a shared agenda and developing actions to be undertaken by project partners in order to develop the coordinated system and people-focussed responses needed to end street homelessness in Adelaide. Connections Week is next. Connections Week is our opportunity in Adelaide to get the data right, to know every person sleeping rough in the inner city area by name and to capture their housing and support needs so that service responses can efficiently be tailored to meet people's needs.

Aligning housing support to needs is the next challenge we face once we have robust data in front of us. The coalition driving the Adelaide Zero Project are aware that this remains a key challenge for the

Project. An Aligned Housing Plan is being developed as a next step. The Plan will identify how a range of secure housing options can be made available to meet the needs of people sleeping rough, and in the shortest time possible. The Plan will also look more broadly at the housing sector and issues of throughput and capacity to identify blockages and avenues for housing homeless people and for preventing homelessness. Working with people to sustain tenancies is part of the aligned housing challenge. Sustaining tenancies will also involve planning, resources and disruptive thinking. We are preparing for that challenge too.

Too many people are sleeping rough in Adelaide. That said, we know that the scale and geography of rough sleeper homelessness in Adelaide makes it eminently solvable. We believe we have most if not all of the pillars of the approach we need to end street homelessness in inner Adelaide. The Adelaide Zero Project journey thus far has shown clearly that we are a city of motivated and passionate individuals and services who are keen to work collaboratively and differently to ensure everyone who wants a place to call home can have one. The next step for the Adelaide Zero Project as a collective: achieve and sustain!

Acknowledgement

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